

Queen Mine
On Centennial Ridge
Medicine Bow National Forest
Centennial vicinity
Albany County
Wyoming

HAER No. WY-19

HAER
WYO,
1-CENT.V,
3-

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Queen Mine

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Location: In Medicine Bow National Forest, on Centennial Ridge, approximately 2.3 miles (in a direct line southwest of Centennial, Albany County, Wyoming.

UTM: 13.402360E.4569540N

Quad: Centennial

Date of Construction: c. 1924

Present Owner: United States Forest Service
Medicine Bow National Forest

Present Use: Abandoned; attracts recreational visitors

Significance: The Queen Mine appears to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. The site is associated with events that have made significant contributions to the broad patterns of our history, i.e., early 20th century mining for precious metals in Wyoming and the western United States. It retains significant architectural features such as the log shafthouse and headframe and hoisting winch. This is perhaps the best-preserved mine support facility in the Medicine Bow National Forest. This feature and the adit, ore dumps and other architectural features define the original mining layout and level of mining technology. This mining operation had to adapt to and utilize materials and techniques suited to a remote, high country environment which was particularly adverse in its exposed position on the crest of Centennial Ridge. The site retains excellent integrity of setting due to its isolated location. It also retains good physical integrity and therefore is able to convey feeling and association with its period of historical significance. No significant concentrations of historic artifacts or materials were located during the survey, and the site has poor deposition. Therefore, no significant buried materials or deposits are expected.

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I. HISTORY

The Queen Mine was first located by A. J. Hull, Jesse Northrop, and B. F. Northrop on September 23, 1923 (Albany County Courthouse, Book 307, p. 478). It was officially known as the Platinum Queen. The partners also filed on the Platinum Queen No. 2 claim which lies on the northeast side of the Queen No. 1. The Queen Mine later became one of the main properties for Hull's Wyoming Platinum and Gold Mining Syndicate which attempted to exploit the platinum reserves of Centennial Ridge to a greater extent than any other concern. In 1924, the shaft on the Queen Mine was down 83 feet, and small assay samples taken by the U. S. Geological Survey showed small amounts of platinum, silver and a trace of gold (Hess 1926:133). However, Hull and his associates continued to develop the Queen. They expanded the shaft to a double compartment shaft and sunk it to a depth of 160 feet and ran a cross cut at the bottom of the shaft for a distance of 140 feet. Hull quoted average assay values of \$26.39 per ton in gold and platinum from the top to the bottom of the main shaft and \$19.54 per ton in gold and platinum for the crosscut tunnel. He felt that the Queen ore shoot was the "main neck or mother ore shoot of the district." Subsequent efforts by his syndicate involved tracing this chute in a northeasterly direction and the sinking of two adits downslope, one of which became the Platinum City Mine. Interest in platinum mining on Centennial Ridge gradually subsided in the 1930s, due to the lack of finds of commercial size and quality. Hull was later indicted for mail fraud, in regard to his promotion of his mines and a townsite known as Platinum City. The Queen Mine property has been worked only intermittently in a desultory fashion since the 1930s (Hull, ca. 1928-1929:1-2). Assay samples taken from the Queen mine dump in 1961 contained only iron and copper. The fine shafthouse and headframe are in an advanced state of deterioration and would require immediate stabilization to preserve the structure. Photographs taken only twenty years ago show that the headframe and tower were totally enclosed with wood siding, and the log shafthouse still retained its room (see 1967 photograph on the cover of McCallum 1968). It appears that during the intervening time, someone salvaged all useable lumber from the structure, thus hastening its decline.

Historical Significance of the Centennial Ridge Mining District

Louis Coughlin, a former ranger and amateur historian for the Medicine Bow National Forest, tersely summed up the history of mining on the forest by stating, "Thus far, the mining industry on the Medicine Bow has just been a nuisance" (Coughlin 1936:3). Certainly from an economic point of view, the mines in the Centennial Ridge District were far from commercial successes. With the possible exception of the Centennial Mine, which produced from \$50,000 to \$90,000 in gold

during its first year of operation, none of the mines in the district had any significant or sustained production. Placed in a regional context, the Centennial Ridge District is a mere footnote in the mining history of the western United States, which included the Great Colorado and Montana gold and silver camps such as Central City, Leadville, Cripple Creek, and Virginia City. The so-called mining rushes experienced on Centennial Ridge in 1876, 1902, and in 1923-1924 were largely based "...on wishful thinking, irresponsible distortion of the facts by the media, and promotional schemes" (Thybon, Rosenberg and Rosenberg 1982:247). It is therefore perhaps more difficult to gauge the historical significance of a mining district that failed.

Nevertheless, the search for precious minerals and base metals opened the region to intensive exploitation and development. It also aided in the creation of a system of roads and was the chief impetus for the building of the Laramie, Hahns Peak, and Pacific Railroad. Mining camps were established, support settlements such as Centennial grew up on the nearby plains, out-of-state investors injected new capital into the local economy, and jobs were created. Many people who were initially drawn to the area by mining later settled there permanently, engaging in other pursuits such as ranching and business.

The short-lived platinum boom, while proving unsuccessful in the long run, was a unique facet of the mining history of Wyoming. As a rare metal, it was "the first known discovery in the world of rich platinum in vein form." Previously, all commercial platinum sources had been obtained from placer operations (Bartlett 1924:9). It is also interesting from the standpoint that non-miners such as students and college professors became interested in the platinum rush and staked their own claims in the area.

Another historical sidelight seldom mentioned in mining histories is that large numbers of unemployed citizens came to the abandoned mining districts during the Great Depression years in an attempt to earn livings by panning and mining precious metals. This is a phenomenon that was unique to this period of time and has not been repeated. Thus, many of the old lode mines and placer claims on Centennial Ridge and along the Middle Fork of the Little Laramie River were reworked during this time.

Although the Centennial Mining District was not successful from a commercial standpoint, the district retains fine integrity of setting because of its isolated location and primitive road system. Many of the component mines still retain significant architectural features such as log shafthouses, bunkhouses, offices, powerhouses, millsites, and adits, shafts, prospect pits and ore dumps. Therefore, the

Centennial Mining District retains a higher degree of feeling and association with its colorful mining past than other districts which were much more economically successful. The Queen Mine retains one of the most interesting and best preserved shafthouses and headframes in the Medicine Bow National Forest, while the Platinum City Mine retains a large platinum processing mill with a flotation machine still intact. These are rare resources that represent early 20th century mining technology.

II. SITE DESCRIPTION

This historic platinum and gold mine was found on the crest of Centennial Ridge on a barren knoll surrounded by limber pine. The site is at an elevation of 9,680 feet and measures approximately 96 m E-W by 50 m N-S.

The site contains a shafthouse (see HAER No. WY-19-A), a log structure (see HAER No. WY-19-B), a log outhouse (see HAER No. WY-19-C), and a rectangular arrangement of logs laid in a rough criss-cross fashion just east of the shafthouse (it is not known if this arrangement of logs constitutes a building site or a storage area for log material).

The artifact assemblage was quite light and limited to round nails and spikes used in construction, a small amount of window glass sherds, stovepipe sections, woven steel cable, wire, a pipe section six inches in diameter, a few evaporated milk cans, an open-top food can, an overall hinged-lid tobacco can, tarpaper fragments, and a small amount of amber and aqua-colored bottom glass sherds. The remains of a steel winch assembly were still mounted in place. There were no manufacturer's trademarks or nameplates on this object.

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